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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Outcome of Israeli Elections

Key stories in the media:

Electronic media presented the nearly final results of yesterday Knesset elections (99.7% of ballots have been counted, with only soldiers votes yet to be included). The results show that Kadima edges Likud by one Knesset seat, but that Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu would be able to muster a right wing-bloc (65 seats vs. 55

for the left). Yediot called this a political knot.Q Netanyahu called for the formation of a national camp government, while Kadima chair Tzipi Livni renewed her call on Netanyahu to form a national unity government. Some commentators evoked the possibility of a rotational government headed by Kadima/Likud. Israel Radio reported that Likud politicians rule this out: Former FM Silvan Shalom told the radio that such an arrangement would be possible only if the two blocs were equal. Yisrael Beiteinu became the third-largest party in the Knesset but fell well below pre-election forecasts of nearly 20-seats; its leader, Avigdor Lieberman, called for the formation of a national camp government. The Labor Party dropped to 13 seats.

Results in Knesset seats as published this morning:

Kadima 28; Likud:27; Yisrael Beiteinu: 15; Labor Party: 13; Shas: 11; United Torah Judaism: 5 ; National Union: 4; Hadash: 4; RaQam TaQal (United Arab List - Arab Movement for Renewal): 4; Meretz: 3; Balad National Democratic Assembly: 3; Jewish Home: 3. (Arab parties total 10 seats, unchanged from the previous Knesset.)

HaQaretz and Israel Radio reported that yesterday UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appointed a board of inquiry into incidents that caused deaths and destruction at UN compounds in Gaza during the recent Israel-Hamas conflict. The board will be headed by Ian Martin, a Briton who has led various crucial UN missions around the world. He has been called on to complete the inquiry and submit a report within one month. Ban said that the board will comprise legal advisers and a military expert. Citing the AP, HaQaretz, The Jerusalem Post, and Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted an Amnesty International report released yesterday as saying that Hamas militants or security forces killed two dozen people and beat or tortured scores more during and after Israel's recent Gaza offensive.

The media reported that yesterday dozens of Arab protesters confronted police in Umm al-Fahm after they learned that Knesset Member Aryeh Eldad (National Union) was there to serve as the town's ballot box chairman. Five people were arrested for disturbing the peace, assault and throwing stones. Maj. Gen. Shimon Koren, Commander of the Northern Police District, ordered the police to show the demonstrators "zero tolerance." The right-wing party had sent Eldad to the Arab town as a backup for extremist Baruch Marzel, leader of the Jewish National Front, who had been authorized by the Central Elections Committee to fill the role of ballot box chairman there. The police had announced their intention to keep Marzel out of the town in order to preserve public safety and let elections proceed unhindered. Media quoted RaQam TaQal MK Ahmed Tibi as saying that he will not support Kadima.

HaQaretz reported that, hours before exit polls were announced, media in the Arab world predicted that QextremistQ right wing political parties were expected to make a strong showing in the Israeli elections. The Jerusalem Post quoted President Shimon Peres as saying yesterday that it is important for television viewers from Arab countries to see democracy in practice. The Jerusalem Post and other media noted that the U.S. media paid scant attention to the elections.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported on confrontations between Jews and Muslims in South Africa and Australia.

HaQaretz reported that a public committee and Education Minister Yuli Tamir have determined that in order to advance co-existence, each of the sectors -- Jewish and Arab -- must be taught about the other's culture, history, beliefs and heritage, from pre-school to grade 12. Instruction hours should likewise be devoted to learning the "narrative of the other side." HaQaretz also reported that, for the first time in the history of Israel's academy, an Arab lecturer, Dr. Mahmoud Yazbak, was elected president of the Middle East and Islamic Studies Association of Israel (MEISAI), the main association of researchers of the Middle East and Islam in Israel. The election brings to an end a long period during which Arabs did not hold key university positions in Israel in the field of Middle East studies.

Outcome of Israeli Elections:

Summary:

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: Irrespective of whether she becomes prime minister or not, Tzipi Livni yesterday won a major victory, one of the most impressive victories in the annals of Israeli politics.

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: Netanyahu has a real behavior problem. This has not changed in the course of the years. It has even, perhaps, gotten worse. If he doesn't straighten up, his second term will be even shorter than his first.

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: A [Kadima-Labor] merger would strengthen the camp that supports a division of the land and a peace deal with Syria, in contrast with the right wing, which opposes any compromise or withdrawal.

Former Meretz leader Dr. Yossi Beilin wrote in the independent Israel Hayom: I had much rather see a government with a clear direction, with two principal goals: the energetic continuation of the diplomatic move vis-à-vis the Palestinians and Syria, and an expansive economic policy investing in infrastructure.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: Israel needs an Arab partner with whom to make peace.... That said, Israel must not shirk its half of the conflict resolution equation.

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Lord wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: The right-wing bloc scores a huge electoral victory - as is well known, a split one, but with a statement by the Israeli public regarding the Kadima governments policy over the past three years.

HaQaretz editorialized: Despite the doubts concerning her experience and her aggressive stance regarding the fighting in Gaza, Livni is better than Netanyahu as Israel's next prime minister.

Block Quotes:

1I. "Even if She Loses, She's Won"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/11): The winner is Livni, but Netanyahu holds the key. If the results of the television stationsQ exit polls donQt differ dramatically from the final tally, Netanyahu is facing one of the most important decisions in his career: he can form a right wing coalition government under his leadership with either 63 or 64 seats. A coalition of that sort will restore to the top tier of the Likud and, first and foremost, to Netanyahu himself the power and influence that they have missed so badly. From their perspective, that is the advantage of such a coalition. But that is hardly the coalition that Netanyahu dreamed about. He doesn't want to head a government whose very existence is dependent on Lieberman and the National Unions whims. The leaders of those parties have a hard time persevering inside coalitions. They will impose political paralysis on Netanyahu and impede his relations with the U.S. administration. It is no coincidence that Netanyahu repeatedly said that the greatest political mistake he made was when he succumbed to the temptation to head a narrow right wing coalition when he was elected prime minister in 1996. He vowed never to repeat that mistake.... The solution that seems to beckon is of a rotating premiership. Livni will serve for two years as prime minister, after which Netanyahu will serve for two years. The voters will love that solution, at first at least. Netanyahu will love it less. Livni isn't going to be overjoyed with the solution, but she probably won't have much of a choice. Irrespective of whether she becomes prime minister or not, Tzipi Livni yesterday won a major victory, one of the most impressive victories in the annals of Israeli politics. She won her party the same number of seats that Ehud Olmert won it in 2006. Olmert had the option of relying on the enormous support that Ariel Sharon had garnered. Livni started almost from scratch. Her campaign was personal: People who voted for Kadima didn't, for the most part, vote for the party or

its list, but for Livni. She has the full right to feel, even if just for a single night, that she is the local Obama.

II. "Lost before Winning"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/11): Only Netanyahu is capable of losing an election which had been a guaranteed victory and then becoming the next prime minister. If only Netanyahu had had a few more days he would also have lost his bid for the role of prime minister. There wasn't a mistake he did not make in the course of his campaign. There was not a single ditch he did not dig for himself. No momentum he did not bring to a halt. His failed deeds will be studied in years to come. And yet, in the end of the day, if there is no huge surprise, he will still Israel's next prime minister. God have mercy on such a government, god have mercy on Israel. Not because of Netanyahu or his capabilities. Because of the system. Because of the stalemate.

Because of the dead end. Yesterday he learned that he who eats alone also loses alone. His loss was not great enough to cost him the role of prime minister. We can only hope that it has taught him a lesson. Netanyahu has a real behavior problem. This has not changed in the course of the years. It has even, perhaps, gotten worse. If he doesn't straighten up, his second term will be even shorter than his first.

III. "Election Equations"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/11): Benjamin Netanyahu has been pigeonholed as hawkish. And while it is true that Tzipi Livni is a centrist, Israel's entire political spectrum has shifted rightward in reaction to years of Palestinian intransigence.... Isn't the [British newspaper The] Guardian's Jonathan Freedland oversimplifying in claiming that Netanyahu rules out any compromise on Jerusalem, and is still refusing to accept a Palestinian state? Is it not a gross exaggeration to claim, as an Associated Press dispatch did, that Netanyahu opposes giving up land for peace? Netanyahu told The Jerusalem Post that he would be delighted to find a formula that allows the Palestinians to govern themselves and Israel to live in security. Regardless of whether our next prime minister is called Livni or Netanyahu, Israel needs an Arab partner with whom to make peace. Ultimately, of course, a deal is dependent on what happens in both polities. That said, Israel must not shirk its half of the conflict resolution equation. Our next premier must ensure that all coalition partners in the new government are committed to what, is after all, a strategic imperative for Israel -- peace.

IV. "Now Is the Time to Merge"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/11): There is no ideological difference between Labor and Kadima that could constitute an immovable obstacle to the parties' merger. Both combine political moderation with security-minded toughness, and their participation in the Olmert government was characterized by agreement on most of the fundamental issues. The crises stemmed from a personal dispute between Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert, not from differences of opinion. A merger would strengthen the camp that supports a division of the land and a peace deal with Syria, in contrast with the right wing, which opposes any compromise or withdrawal. As the largest parliamentary faction, the merged party would be the one to form the next government. Even if it needs right-wing parties in the coalition, it would still be a center-left government -- and this is how Israel would be viewed by the rest of the world. A merger would keep the right wing from expanding the settlements, would save Israel from clashing with the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama, and would do away with the racist ideas of Avigdor Lieberman.

V. From a Tie to a Decisive Government

Former Meretz leader Dr. Yossi Beilin wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (2/11): Responding to those who would suggest a rotation and a stable coalition, a decisive coalition is necessary ... I had much rather see a government with a clear direction, with two principal goals: the energetic continuation of the diplomatic move vis-à-vis the Palestinians and Syria, and an expansive economic policy investing in infrastructure.... When the support of the entire [center-left] camp is ensured, Livni could check at the same

time the possibility of expanding the coalition through bodies such as United Torah Judaism and other factions. The right-wing camp may still reserve more surprises in the future.

VI. "The Public Said QNoQ to the Left-Wing Bloc"

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Lord wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (2/11): Outwardly, the results of yesterdays elections are a tie between the two large parties, but there is no doubt which political bloc won the elections big-time. The right-wing bloc scores a huge electoral victory - as is well known, a split one, but with a statement by the Israeli public regarding the Kadima governments policy over the past three years. That statement cannot be interpreted by an elated Kadima leader as victory.... If the Knesset eventually looks like yesterdays exit polls, well force a political situation of a right-wing government in which there is no natural partner for a national unity government. Kadima came out [of the elections] too strong.

VII. The Preferred Candidate

Haaretz editorialized (2/10): In today's elections, the contenders for prime minister are Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu and Kadima leader Tzipi Livni, each of whom represents a different approach to Israel's future.... Netanyahu's positions and the Likud's extreme Knesset list guarantee the perpetuation of the occupation and the settlements (under the guise of economic peace), and bode poorly for Israel's international status. His policy will lead Israel to a confrontation with Barack Obama's administration, which seeks to advance the two-state solution. Livni is not an ideal candidate. She pushed the outgoing cabinet to an erroneous war in Gaza and drove to expand it into a ground operation.... But in the most important issue at stake, the one in which the candidates present clear differences in approach and way -- the future of the relations with the Palestinians -- Livni has made the right decision for dividing the land and the two-state solution. She has adhered to this approach for several years now and led the move to resume the final status arrangement talks with Ehud Olmert in the outgoing government.... This is why, despite the doubts concerning her experience and her aggressive stance regarding the fighting in Gaza, Livni is better than Netanyahu as Israel's next prime minister.

CUNNINGHAM